



Public Libraries in the Priorities of Canada

Acting on the Assets and Opportunities

Prepared for the Provincial and Territorial Library Directors Council (PTLDC)

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Executive Summary

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Scope and Purpose of this Report

In both their traditional and newer, partnership-based services, Canada's public libraries support and advance the priorities of provincial and territorial governments. This paper outlines the significant assets of Canada's public libraries in relation to these social and economic priorities. It suggests opportunities for additional benefit to the provinces and territories through greater utilization of these assets. It summarizes both the traditional strengths of public libraries and their proven effectiveness as natural partners to governments and others in innovative new programs. It cites a representative sample of "Canadian public library moments" to illustrate program effectiveness.

Prepared for the Provincial and Territorial Library Directors Council (PTLDC), this map of the policy and program territory is intended to be a springboard to discussion within the jurisdictions about the extent to which public libraries can further advance policy and program objectives. Following these discussions, it is intended that a common national agenda be developed for the provinces and territories to pursue with their federal partners.

The provincial and territorial agencies represented in PTLDC vary, but they are generally responsible for policy advice, coordination of funding, coordination of services, development and monitoring of legislation, administration of grants, and interpreting the provincial/territorial interest in public library service.

Assets of Public Libraries as Effective Partners

Canada's public libraries have been successful and highly esteemed providers of direct services, with a distinguished history that goes back over two hundred years. However, the fundamental assets of public libraries as partners - within communities and with all levels of government - are less obvious publicly than their traditional service roles. Yet as partners in a wide range of initiatives, public libraries have had impact well beyond their numbers and budgets. The strengths and leverage of public libraries as partners help to explain this outstanding record of innovation and success in helping to advance social and economic objectives.

- **Ubiquity and physical place** – 3,600 accessible, citizen-centric service points, serving nearly all Canadians, in urban, rural, and remote communities.
- **High public credibility, participation, and satisfaction** – responding to 24 million reference questions and lending over 240 million items a year (not counting the burgeoning electronic self-help service), public libraries have 2/3 of Canadians as card-carrying members; surveys show their well-documented high levels of public satisfaction exceed all public and private sector service providers except fire and ambulance departments.
- **Fiscal accountability, frugality, and stability** – not only socially responsive, but also well managed and fiscally accountable, demonstrating cost-effective use of public funds.
- **Demonstrated economic and social reach** – supporting commerce and the development of small business, they are also a conduit for the governments and other partner organizations to reach target groups within the multi-million public library membership base.
- **Neutrality** – lacking divisive alignments, they are fair and impartial tax-supported organizations that engage trust and dialogue with partners.
- **Understanding of information technology and information-seeking behaviour** – with in-depth experience in information technology systems, and expertise in helping people at all levels of literacy to benefit from technology access, public libraries provide the country's preferred venue for public Internet access.
- **Understanding of diversity; commitment to inclusion and culture** – serving the entire cultural, age, and physical ability spectrum, without exclusions, as trusted public institutions; preserving and promoting Canada's regional and national cultural fabric.
- **Experience in partnership** – natural partners because of their flexibility, accessibility, and market penetration, public libraries have a record of collaboration with volunteer and community-based groups, sponsors, and all levels of government, across the policy spectrum.
- **Robust networks** – though rooted in its own community, even the smallest public library is part of a multi-sector fabric of Canadian libraries 22,000 strong, connected

with Library and Archives Canada, enabling every citizen to use the public library as a gateway to the world's libraries; networked with governments and other organizations.

- **Local and networked information resources** – providing direct and interlibrary loan access to physical collections of 89 million items (in public libraries) and 465 million publications (in academic and other types of libraries in Canada), in addition to millions of licensed electronic information resources, many available 24/7, responding to community needs and preferences.

Public Libraries in Policy and Program Delivery

Public libraries are positioned as ready, willing, and able assets to their communities and to all levels of government. They already play significant roles in the implementation of government priorities in five broad social and economic objectives. There are many opportunities for further leverage of the strengths of public libraries to maximize progress in cost-effective ways.

Objective: Early childhood reading readiness for lifelong learning

With an established role in preschool reading readiness, nationally the public library is the only public institution responding to the learning needs of the pre-school child. Current research shows the strong impact of research-based public library programs on key family literacy behaviours. Early reading, known to have lasting positive impact, is acknowledged to have greater significance than previously recognized. Public libraries work effectively with parents and many diverse partner organizations to deliver services to children and their families. Promoting traditional literacy and reading, they also advance essential Internet and media literacy, particularly in partnership with the Media Awareness Network, helping children to approach electronic media with critical thinking skills.

Objective: Empowering Canadians to participate in a civic society

Public libraries are vibrant civic spaces. Responsive to Canada's growing diversity, they encourage and enable intercultural services and communication that are essential to sustain and strengthen Canada's distinct civic chemistry. Known to be the preferred public online access sites, public libraries are the citizen's ultimate search engine. They enable effective use of governments' Web-based information and transactions. They help to maintain viability of small and remote communities where other services such as banks and post offices may have closed. They are at the forefront of advocacy and service development for people with disabilities with such allies as the CNIB. They articulate and advocate the public interest in issues such as digital copyright, helping to preserve the Canadian tradition of balance in public policy.

Objective: Exploiting technology as enabler of innovation and equity

As the “human face in an interface world”, public libraries sustain the combination essential for benefit from the digital age: infrastructure, content, and access. They are integral to Canada’s information infrastructure and central to broadband deployment strategies. They create and deliver digital content. They have been key enablers of government strategy to mitigate Canada’s persistent and significant Digital Divide. Although this damaging gap persists, financial support of the federal government to sustain access has dropped severely as of Spring 2004. Public libraries have collaborated in e-government (information and transactions) delivery and there is scope for greater involvement of public libraries in this emerging government service priority. Consumer health information is but one example. They also provide access to high-quality data bases not available free on the Internet, frequently through consortia of libraries. They enable people at the margins of society to develop technology skills and participate in the Digital Age.

Objective: Promoting equity and inclusion

Public libraries serve such special populations as immigrants, refugees, multicultural groups, Aboriginals, persons with disabilities, and rural and remote residents, without exclusion. They have demonstrated an ability to leverage small amounts of funding into major service improvements, especially public Internet access and training (an achievement in serious jeopardy with Industry Canada’s recent budget decisions). Urban public libraries have responded to the growing diversity in cities with special programs that strengthen social cohesion. The urban public library is an important vehicle of integration of immigrant families into the mainstream of Canadian life. Library services to Aboriginals in urban and reserve settings have made promising strides, but warrant strengthening if equity is to be achieved. Youth at risk and the elderly benefit from many successful public library initiatives responding to their special needs. Libraries also digitize and share Canada’s community material, so that all may see themselves in the nation’s story. Our unique identity and culture are built on the foundation of these community stories and experience.

Objective: Strengthening the knowledge based economy

In the crucial job-producing small and home-based business sector, public libraries are especially effective information resources and business incubators. They respond to rapid change in delivery of formal education programs, publishing, information access, and the new economy, enabling greater individual participation in, and benefit from, the knowledge-based economy. They foster a culture of active lifelong learning and critical thinking. They advance the potential of e-learning strategies by enabling access and providing guidance. In their varied digitization projects, frequently in consortia, they also create intellectual capital. Their purchasing power (about \$880 million in 1999) helps to create a market for Canadian information and knowledge products. Public libraries also advance the knowledge-based economy by providing information on career choice; they excel at job search assistance. In addition to preventing illiteracy by encouraging early reading, they have a remarkable record of success in adult literacy support programs, frequently in collaboration with volunteer groups. Many offer Homework Help

programs to struggling in-school students. However, there is already concern about the prospect of serious shortages of specialized library staff for the complex social and technical work of responding to changing social needs and rapid technological change. As in other professions that are key to the economic, social, and cultural objectives of Canada, succession issues in the library profession are in need of attention.

Conclusion

Partnerships with public libraries work. Based on the assets above and stellar performance, public libraries have the potential and the capacity to lend their considerable strengths to the achievement of high-priority policy initiatives across Canada well beyond their “traditional” scope. Their services, values, community participation and satisfaction rates, creativity, and infrastructure lend themselves well to the major current policy thrusts of provincial and territorial governments. The record shows that investments made in public libraries by senior levels of government have been well placed. It is now time for further engagement of these creative, responsible, and esteemed public institutions across traditional ministerial and jurisdictional lines in the service of Canada’s agreed priorities. The full development and utilization of public library strengths will pay major dividends.

Public Libraries in the Priorities of Canada

Acting on the Assets and Opportunities

Scope and Purpose of this Report

Canada's provincial, territorial, and federal governments are focusing their attention on areas of greatest economic and social priority. Despite many differences among the jurisdictions, there is much common ground evident in their confirmed priorities. All are committed to a careful regimen of fiscal stewardship and accountability. They seek to enhance economic competitiveness through diversification, education, and innovation. Early childhood development appears frequently. Governments also place a high value on safeguarding the health and well-being of individuals and communities. There are, in addition, many references to strengthening the learning culture.

Canada's public libraries support and advance these key priorities. The ubiquity, high public participation and trust, technical proficiency, inclusiveness, and partnership experience of these libraries can be engaged to a much greater extent, however, to make the difference needed. This will include both current and (as yet) untapped ways. The huge potential has the greatest chance to be realized if policy and program developers become more familiar with the high volume and impact of public library service relevant to these priorities.

In this paper, the Provincial and Territorial Library Directors Council (PTLDC) has endeavoured to map the policy and program territory relevant to public libraries, whether or not this relevance is evident in current government programs. This map is intended, first, to assist with policy and program development, functioning as a springboard to cross-departmental discussions within the individual jurisdictions. Following these discussions, it is intended that a common national agenda be developed and confirmed for the provinces and territories to pursue with their federal partners. The greatest possible progress can be made on a broad and concerted national base.

Role of the Provincial and Territorial Library Agencies

The provincial and territorial library agencies represented in PTLDC vary somewhat in their home ministries and their mandates. However, they are generally responsible for policy advice and development on public library services, the coordination and leveraging of provincial/territorial funding for these services, the coordination of the services themselves, the development of public library legislation and monitoring of compliance with the legislation of the jurisdiction, administering public library grants and government accountability requirements, and the representation and interpretation of the provincial/territorial and public interest in public library service. In some jurisdictions, the provincial/territorial agency actually provides public library service.

Public Libraries as Effective Partners

Canada's public libraries have been successful and highly esteemed providers of direct services for over a hundred and fifty years. They began – and remain – as our society's informal education system. They have been adding new roles as economic incubators, community development agents, distributors of electronic information, and centres for lifelong learning to their traditional direct service portfolio. This places them in more public policy and program contexts than ever before.

The fundamental assets of public libraries as partners within communities and with all levels of government are less obvious publicly than their traditional service roles. Yet as partners in a wide range of initiatives, public libraries have had impact well beyond their numbers and budgets. Partnerships may exist between separate institutions or they may be the result of mergers. They may fund and/or create digital services. They exist across all types of libraries. They may be established with for-profit or not-for-profit organizations. They may work through consortia at local, regional, and national levels.

The following fundamental strengths of public libraries help to explain this outstanding record of innovation and success. They also point the way to expansion of financial and other investment in future partnership.

1. Ubiquity and physical place.

Nearly all ¹ Canadians reside where they have access to the services of public libraries. With 3,600 ² “service points” (branches, central libraries, bookmobiles, provincial/territorial library service points) they are everywhere. In fact, a public library is in some sense a defining characteristic of a Canadian community. Even in very small places, where banks, post offices, and government offices may have closed, the public library remains a treasured sign of community and focus of community action.

2. High public participation and satisfaction.

Two-thirds of Canadians have a public library card.³ In addition to the high (though not consistently counted) number of unassisted electronic and other self-help transactions for which public libraries are organized, Canadians ask nearly 24 million personal questions and borrow over 240 million items a year (1999 data, published in 2002).⁴ The number of personal visits is high: almost ten times more people visited Canadian public libraries each year than attended Canadian NHL hockey games in the three most recent years combined, and nine times more people visit Canadian public libraries each year than attend performing arts productions.⁵ A series of national (*Citizens First*) surveys ⁶ has confirmed that, of 24 major public and private sector service providers, citizens' rating of public libraries is exceeded only by fire and ambulance departments. This ranks them ahead of banks, police, telephone companies, supermarkets, public transit, department stores, and all three levels of government. The five “drivers” of this rating are timeliness, knowledge and competence of staff, courtesy and comfort, fair treatment, and outcome.

3. Fiscal accountability, frugality, and stability.

Public libraries are longstanding, stable, and publicly accountable organizations that have demonstrated extraordinary frugality and creativity in their use of public funds. When making financial decisions, even in the toughest of times, they have a record of putting service to the public first.

4. Demonstrated economic and social reach.

Libraries stimulate local commerce in such areas as information technology. They are also themselves major purchasers of Canadian and international resources from Canadian distributors. With their high membership numbers and their familiarity with local organizations, libraries are an effective conduit to the target markets of potential partners. They are mainstays of support to small and home-based business development. A study done for the Southern Ontario Library Service ascertained that there are 21 measurable indicators of the social/economic impact (12 social measures, 9 economic)⁷ of public libraries. Libraries also generate goodwill and other intangible assets.⁸

5. Neutrality.

Libraries are firmly in the Canadian mainstream in the value they place on learning, democracy, and equity of access as social goods. They are tax-based services. They can form partnerships with a wide range of organizations because they do not have or advocate divisive alignments. In their encouragement of exposure to many points of view, they occupy a trusted position. The impartiality and fairness of public libraries are significant catalysts for the action of others; they help to create common ground on which otherwise disparate groups can collaborate.

6. Understanding of technology and information-seeking behaviour.

The public library has in-depth experience in information technology and systems. This is the institution that introduced most Canadians over 50 to computer use (when library catalogues were first computerized). It was among the earliest adopters of the Internet among public organizations. The public library also has thorough knowledge of the purchase, development, maintenance, and distribution of electronic information. The public library understands and responds to actual human information-seeking behaviour within the entire age and literacy spectrum of Canadian society. It has the deep staff expertise required to provide an integrated resource – digital and non-digital – to the individual at any given level of computer literacy.

7. Understanding of diversity; commitment to inclusion and culture.

The public library routinely serves the entire range of citizens and newcomers, “from cradle to grave”. It invites and attracts new Canadians. It serves people of every cultural group and background, of various levels of literacy, of varying physical ability (including the blind and print-disabled), and of all socio-economic levels. It therefore has exceptional knowledge of the needs of marginalized groups and neighbourhoods as well as the mainstream. Moreover, the public library enjoys the trust of these groups. As partners in such programs as writers in residence, digitization, and cultural programming, public libraries preserve, support, and promote Canada’s distinct regional and national cultural fabric.

8. Experience in partnership.

The Canadian public library is experienced in partnership initiatives with community-based groups (e.g., literacy groups, children’s services, ICT networks, chambers of commerce, arts and heritage groups, service clubs) and with larger entities (e.g., Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) and upper levels of government (e.g., HRSDC – Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, formerly HRDC; Industry Canada; Service Canada; provincial and territorial departments) right across the policy spectrum. The flexibility, accessibility, and market penetration of public libraries present uniquely valuable assets to such partners.

9. Robust networks.

Every public library is part of a network 22,000 strong: the network of all Canadian libraries.⁹ Public libraries are especially well connected with each other and with the Library and Archives Canada (formerly National Library) for such purposes as resource sharing (e.g., traditional interlibrary loan, buying groups, and emerging digital cooperatives). This is due in no small part to the earlier investment of all levels of government, to the role of the Library Book Rate (a federal program which since 1939 has assisted in extending library services to rural and remote areas, through a discount to libraries mailing print materials to their users or other libraries) and to a tradition of collaboration. As a result of these networks, the individual citizen possesses a local public library “gateway” to Canada’s (and the world’s) libraries in an already-familiar and welcoming place where there is “no wrong door”. Public libraries are also well networked with governments and the non-government sector.

10. Local and networked information resources.

Every subject of interest to the public is represented in the immense composite resource of Canada’s public libraries. This is a shared public asset of locally accessible materials comprising 88,948,278 items¹⁰ and a wider Canadian library network of some 465,000,000 publications in academic and other Canadian libraries.¹¹ These physical collections are the “tip of the iceberg”: they are the visible, shelf-ready face of a vast

storehouse that includes high-quality electronic data that is not available free on the Internet. The electronic resources, purchased usually in consortia, are frequently available for both in-library use and convenient remote access, 24 hours a day.

Public Libraries in Policy and Program Delivery

Public libraries are positioned as a ready, willing, and able asset to all levels of government in the implementation of their policy and program objectives in five broad areas.

OBJECTIVE: EARLY CHILDHOOD READING READINESS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

Role in early learning. Although formal early childhood education varies significantly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction across Canada, nationally the public library is the only public institution addressing the learning needs of the preschool child. Research indicates that getting children to read and learn is the role that North Americans consider foremost in the public library mission. The role of public libraries in addressing the reading readiness of the preschool child is already significant and well established. This role becomes more significant as current research reinforces the crucial nature of the preschool years, for which society has yet to make public investments comparable to those for school-age children.

Windsor (ON) Public Library

This library engages many community partners to enhance existing early years services by redesigning its current space and adding program materials; creating a designated early years space with developmentally appropriate materials; expanding the print collection focusing on board books for infants, multilingual books for children, and books on parenting; and creating an early years parenting kiosk, with materials connecting parents to services. New services for parents and children on site include pre-school story time, and programmes for infants and toddlers; weekend story times (multilingual) in partnership with multicultural agencies; a service where parents can ask for advice from an early years specialist; and outreach to parents in the community, which includes training of community agencies, parents and lay care-givers in storytelling; and promoting the importance of reading to young children.

Impact on key literacy behaviours. Policy and program initiatives to address this can benefit from the latest research measuring the effectiveness of the public library's performance as an effective partner. The latest major study¹² shows that research-based programs in public libraries involving parents and caregivers of preschoolers result in a significant increase in key literacy behaviours. Remarkably, this increase occurs among parents of every age, educational background, income level, and ethnicity. The public library is known to, and accessible to, the entire range of the target groups for early years emphasis.

Colchester – East Hants (NS) Public Library

“We have an elderly borrower who is legally blind. The library is able to provide for her specialized Braille picture books so she can read to her grandchild, who is learning to read.” This is one of the ways in which the library makes a difference in family literacy.

Strategic impact. The striking research results about key literacy behaviours are particularly important in view of the high (90%) probability that a child who reads poorly at the end of the first grade will read poorly at the end of the fourth grade.¹³ Early reading readiness is vital; public libraries understand this and act on it.

Key targets. Public libraries are demonstrably effective partners with such organizations as nursery schools, day care centres, public health departments, community-based children’s services, multilingual and multicultural groups, the school system, and networks of home-schoolers. With targeted funds and additional strategic partnerships to leverage the existing assets of public libraries, public libraries could expand their penetration and effectiveness with key targets (e.g., parents of 0-23 months old children, teen parents and those with low education and income). They could also expand their use of non-traditional means to reach those not currently using the library (for example, because of transportation problems or minority languages). Excellent examples of targeting the families of newborns with literacy support materials exist in many communities (e.g., Born to Read, Raising Readers) but such programs are not consistently available across Canada. In addition, research implies a focus on communicating: reinforcing to parents the value and importance of simply taking a child to the public library regularly, as an act of positive parenting in an age of parental pressure and anxiety.

Northern Ontario public libraries and the Blue Sky Region Community Network

Raise a Reader, an Early Years literacy program, is delivered to parents and pre-school children at nine different public library locations. Partners include a university, a book store, a toy shop, a service club, and many others. The objective is to increase the ability of parents to help their children in the development of literacy and problem-solving skills.

Surrey (BC) Public Library

The Library’s “Community Connections” Web site improves information sharing amongst residents, community organizations, and government agencies. The Library hosts the community Web site, which organizes and links the various non-profit agencies in Surrey that have a Web presence. An interactive form on the site encourages new community groups to get involved.

Children and Internet/media literacy. The actual challenge transcends traditional literacy – it includes the broader “information literacies of the 21st century”. In the interests of children and families, public libraries have taken a leading role in media literacy, chiefly through partnership with Canada’s world-class Media Awareness Network (MNet). MNet’s national, bilingual media literacy program targets parents, teachers, librarians, and all who care for children to help them become safe, wise, and responsible Internet users. The unregulated nature of the Internet and the intensity of Internet use among young people make the ongoing media education of children and caregivers imperative and urgent. Expansion of MNet’s delivery capacity requires

stable multi-year funding of this existing and successful partnership that already has considerable financial and in-kind contributions from the private sector. This could enable licensing of MNet workshops to all Canadian libraries.

Oromocto (NB) Public Library and Web Awareness Day

One of many public libraries celebrating the now-annual Web Awareness Day, Oromocto Public Library offered special programming February 19, 2004, aimed at familiarizing parents and caregivers with the issues that arise when children go online. Public libraries are frequent presenters of MNet's workshops: Safe Passage, Fact or Folly, Kids for Sale, and Parenting the Net Generation. International interest in the partnership of public libraries and MNet is growing. Average monthly traffic on the MNet Web site is approaching 300,000 visits.

OBJECTIVE: EMPOWERING CANADIANS TO PARTICIPATE IN A CIVIC SOCIETY

Public libraries as public squares. Public libraries are vibrant civic spaces – the “public squares” of a society in which an educated, informed citizenry is not only a private good but also a public good. Essential to the health and wealth of our society, this has significant implications for building the democratic future of Canada in an environment of rapid change. The role of the public library in empowering people to participate in a civil society is both a traditional and a continuing one in the Digital Age.

*“To sustain a civic society, we need public sites where community members can renew knowledge. We need to recognize public libraries as essential civic space.” (Canadian intellectual and media commentator **Janice Gross Stein**, in her keynote speech at the CLA/ALA conference, Toronto, June 2003.)*

Intercultural services and communication. Public libraries are responsive to Canada’s growing diversity, for example, to immigrant and Aboriginal population. Their collections and services (such as adult learning courses, language classes, and discussion circles) also celebrate and promote the intercultural dialogue that has become essential to the distinct civic chemistry of Canada. In fact, the public library is one of the most successful of all community institutions in welcoming and integrating newcomers. It therefore has a key place in the intercultural activity that Canada wants and needs to engage.

Surrey (BC) Public Library

Surrey’s Language Learning Lab provides self-teaching software and audio CD kits for adults to learn English at their own pace, on their own schedules.

Government online. Research shows that public libraries are the citizens’ preferred places for public access to online government information and services, due to the combination of reasonable hours of service, online access, and professional assistance with online applications. Public libraries are therefore sites of democratic governance. Policy and program initiatives to strengthen the local presence of government and reduce the complexity of citizen interaction with government have a willing and able partner in public libraries, as pilot programs have demonstrated.

Oxford County (ON) Public Library

“A senior who had a colostomy was paying all non-prescription supply costs out of pocket until his wife learned on-line at a library that some are covered by OHIP. Library staff obtained information for the client regarding what is covered, and how to complete the form, and provided referral to the Community Care Access Centre for additional help.”

Community viability. The small local public library is a lynchpin in maintaining community viability where many banks, schools, and other public institutions have closed. As a huge country, where rural and remote communities account for approximately two-thirds of the land mass but only one-fifth of the people, Canada aspires to ensure the viability of its smaller, remote, and Aboriginal communities and to occupy its territory securely. A continuing financial and policy investment in public libraries and the infrastructure of connectivity is therefore a continuing investment in small, rural, and remote community viability.

Nipigon (ON) Public Library

“The population of Nipigon is approximately 1900 people, and the area is surrounded by bush & forests. Each year, tree planters work several kilometres away. This year, Tuesday is their ‘town day’. The library is located next door to the Laundromat. Need I say more? The library is rocking. I love Tuesdays. One young man found out that he was eligible for a \$20,000.00 school scholarship. You can imagine the celebration that took place that day.”

Wildwood [hamlet] (AB) Public Library

“When the news hit our paper that the Wildwood Tourist Booth would not be operating in 2003, a FOWLS (Friends of the Wildwood Library Society) member suggested that Wildwood Library try it. We were able to receive funding from two organizations which had previously sponsored the tourist booth to help with operating costs. We had approval for 2 summer employees, so we hired two and were open 6 days a week. The tourist information was an overwhelming success! We had 125 people sign in our guest book. The tourists loved our clean bathrooms, free internet access and the ‘friendly and helpful’ staff.”

Disability and advocacy. Public libraries are at the forefront of advocacy for services to persons with disabilities, working with such bodies as the Council on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians. Public libraries support and participate in the campaign of the CNIB Library for the Blind to double its collection and convert its analogue facilities to a digital platform, in the slogan of the campaign, “That All May Read”. Public libraries are not only part of a technology-assisted network of service to persons with disabilities, but they also advance the case for essential core public funding for this service, which is government-funded in all other industrialized countries.

“The equivalent of the Gutenberg Press has come to those who are unable to read print because of a disability.” (Jane Beaumont, Chair of the CBIB Library Board, and Jim Sanders, President and CEO of the CNIB, on the potential of technology and partnerships to support the development a nationwide, equitable, alternative-format public library service.)

Calgary (AB) Public Library

In the words of Aimee, a user of ALEX, the Library's adaptive technology: "The library allows you to be you. Knowledge keeps me from being ridiculed."

Public policy and protection of the public interest. Public libraries are effective advisory partners to government at all levels in the development of policy, legislation, and regulation. By advising government on the implications of copyright (particularly in the digital environment, a discussion generally dominated in the mass media by music and motion picture industries), public libraries identify and support the broader public interest. They contribute similarly to policy issues such as the distribution of government information (in print and electronic forms), the protection of the privacy of the individual, the need for a special rate for mailings to remote users (Library Book Rate), and the implications of international treaties such as GATS and TRIPS for public ownership of our public sector. Such assistance and advocacy raises the debate beyond purely economic rights and maintains the tradition of balance in Canadian public policy.

Nelson (BC) Public Library

"Losing the Library Book Rate would hurt all Canadians but I would venture to say that those of us well outside of the large urban centres would be hurt the most. In a country the size of Canada with such distances between us, such equalizers are essential!"

Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries

"We have approximately 500 communities and 96 libraries, so books by mail and interlibrary loan are very important aspects of our system. With the benefits of the Library Book Rate, we spend about \$25,000 for distribution of library materials through Canada Post. Without it, we estimate it would cost us \$100,000 for the same amount of materials. If this had to come out of our materials budget, it would cost us 5,000 new books - more than 50 books per library."

OBJECTIVE: EXPLOITING TECHNOLOGY AS ENABLER OF INNOVATION AND EQUITY

Sustaining the essential combination: infrastructure, content, access. Public libraries are uniquely effective partners in the implementation of Canada's world-leading connectivity achievements. They provide access to the information infrastructure that has been critical to realizing the government's initiative. They contain, create, and deliver content. They have the staff skill to bridge the gap between the information universe and the Canadian citizens who wish to access it. This effective combination enables people not only to connect, but also to navigate, retrieve and use the information available to them. It makes the public library the ultimate search engine of the ordinary citizen. Partnerships formed to implement the Community Access Program (CAP), including access, training, and content development, have gone on to additional related work. Examples include the broadband and literacy initiatives of the Blue Sky Network in Northern Ontario. As the volume of information and transactions of value to the public grows, this partnership between governments and libraries has also been growing in value and impact. In the Spring of 2004, however, Industry Canada eliminated the LibraryNet program altogether and reduced the Community Access Program by 44%. This technology partnership must be moved off the shrinking platform on which it now rests and placed on a stable multi-year financial footing that reflects the huge federal, provincial and municipal stake in its success.

Report of the National Broadband Task Force

"Why, when home and workplace access are becoming more mainstream in Canadian society, will public access sites continue to be essential for the foreseeable future? The current experience of public access sites, especially in public libraries, indicates that the demand is actually growing and not declining. . . Children in households with low income are more than three times as unlikely to have any form of computing available at home . . . School access. . . is not generally available during evening or weekend hours. . . Many Canadians use public access because they lack technical proficiency or confidence and require assistance for searches and transactions they view as quite complex. Public access remains a key to market development for commercial Internet access."

The persistent Digital Divide. More than one in two Canadians have accessed the Internet from a public place, and for those who have done so, the public library is the first choice of location. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and others have recognized the unique strategic role of public libraries in mitigating Canada's persistent and significant Digital Divide. (This divide remains real. Statistics Canada's July 2004 bulletin noted that, although the number of households using the Internet continued to grow somewhat in 2003, there was virtually no growth in household access by the lowest income quartile.¹⁴) There are also urban-rural divides, and gaps related to levels of education, family type, and age. The public library is therefore the prime institution for a continuing public investment in equity and effective government service delivery. To strengthen innovation and equity, the implementation of the National Broadband Task Force's envisaged multi-sectoral approach to building broadband needs to be expedited. It addresses content, infrastructure, and access. This view has been reinforced by the Conference

Board of Canada, which highlighted broadband, content, and wireless as priorities for Canada's competitiveness.

Cape Breton (NS) Regional Library

A story from the TechnologyForAll Project, providing information technology driven employment interventions through the Gates Resource Centre to unemployed and under-employed people: "After many years with his company as manager of the company warehouse, James was told that a high school completion diploma was now required. Despite being very good at his job and very popular with coworkers, James was going to lose his position if he didn't obtain a grade twelve equivalency. In his late 50's, it had been over forty years since James had been inside a classroom. . . James finally passed the Language Arts test and received his high school diploma. The combination of the assisted learning he had through the Gates Resource Centre, and the support materials he was able to borrow from the library's collection, helped him to achieve his goal. What is more important, he kept his job. For some, passing the GED test is purely for personal satisfaction. But for others, like James, the stakes are much, much higher."

E-government. As model users of information technology in their operations, Canada's public libraries make digital information and transactions accessible to the individual citizen, an experience that could be more widely shared with government. There is no need to duplicate the public library infrastructure to bring innovative public sector services to small communities – with modest funding, training programs and service standards could be developed to meet e-government needs and quality assurance requirements. Public libraries are the ideal delivery mechanism for high-priority government information such as consumer health guidance. They are also ideal places for citizens to complete transactions with government.

Greater Sudbury (ON) Public Library

The Citizen Service Centres co-located with the public library branches deliver municipal services through in-person visits, telephone, fax, email, and Internet. At these centres, citizens can pay their taxes, pick up a dog license, buy a bus pass, register for recreation programs, or get information.

Oxford County (ON) Public Library

In partnership with the County of Oxford and HRDC local offices, the Library became a successful 27-month pilot for "Service Canada", offering federal government information and services through a community network of access centres. The federal government funded the staff wages, training, promotion, and overhead. Benefits included a more comfortable and relaxed environment for citizens, a professional standard of service, and increased public awareness of the programs and services of government.

IsleAsk: Provincial Library Service of Prince Edward Island

The Provincial Library Service is a partner in an award-winning collaborative reference service for the province. Software and the knowledge of librarians in the college, university, and public libraries in the province are engaged to provide answers to questions posed by residents of PEI on such subjects as child care, dental practice equipment, waste management, and beach access legislation.

Digital libraries and seamless access. Public libraries are exploiting technology to develop digital libraries over whole jurisdictions, by negotiating group subscriptions to key data bases. These are available 24/7, helping to bridge the service gaps between large and small communities and reducing the cost per search transaction by distributing the costs over a wider base. This approach also supports innovation and content development in the publishing industry in an online world in which less than 1% of the accessible content is Canadian. With promising models for content (e.g., Ontario Digital Library) and access (The Alberta Library) in place or in the planning stages, there is potential for many such provincial or regional initiatives and, ultimately, for the broadening of the base of collaboration to “one card” for library service, similar to the “Interac” card. In the same way that funding for AMICUS, Canada’s national online bibliography, makes it available to all libraries free of charge, these digital library initiatives can demonstrate superior value for funds invested in innovation and equity.

The Alberta Library

This province-wide consortium developed TAL Online, a web-based catalogue for more than two hundred public and post-secondary libraries in the province. A unique feature offers links to reviews of some of the resources in the catalogue.

Truro (NS) Public Library

“For me personally, the library has helped me get a job using the Internet, given me entertainment when I had no money, helped me do research for learning. One of the truly equal playing fields left!”

Margins to mainstream. Public libraries enable equity in the form of technology services, skills, and content to otherwise marginalized groups. Aboriginals benefit from having online access to land records. Web4all, an assistive technology combining hardware and software, can quickly configure a public access computer to accommodate a user’s special needs and then return to a standard setting for the next user. Citizens in rural and remote communities can participate in the mainstream, telling their stories and selling their products online, thus helping to maintain the economic viability of their communities and ensure the provision of government services. For these benefits to occur, it is essential that the ratio of public access terminals to citizens be reasonable – the National Broadband Task Force’s assumption of a ratio of one public access terminal for every 500 citizens is an appropriate one.

Fort Saskatchewan (AB) Public Library

The program coordinator of the local family violence prevention service reported to the Library that “All of the women who have come to the Library have enjoyed this positive experience. One client in particular has learned to use your free computers to send email, create a resume, and look for work online.”

Ontario's first Aboriginal Lieutenant-Governor, the Hon. James K. Bartleman

"I was fortunate that I had access to libraries as a youngster – both the public library and my school library – even if there was nothing to be found in either that showed history from the perspective of Aboriginal people . . . More must be done to ensure that First Nations people have access to library and information services adequate to satisfy the full range of their needs. Lack of culturally appropriate library and information resources on reserves can be a significant barrier to achieving educational standards that will allow young Aboriginal people to make their way in the so-called Information Age."

OBJECTIVE: PROMOTING EQUITY AND INCLUSION

A level playing field. Because their services are equitable and inclusive by design, tradition, and even legislation, public libraries excel in service roles and opportunities relevant to immigrants, aboriginals, persons with disabilities, the poor, and residents of rural and remote areas.

Nipigon (ON) Public Library

“One computer user planned her trip to Toronto two months ago using Mapquest. Her husband was scheduled for surgery and she wanted to locate a Bed and Breakfast close to the hospital. She also wanted to find out where the closest public library was located, within walking distance of the clinic. . . After her accommodations were booked, she contacted various family members by email.”

Rural and remote community service. Public libraries in rural and remote communities have particular roles and opportunities, since inclusion and thriving of these communities is a key to Canada’s viability as a country with a huge land mass and widely distributed population. Rural librarians describe the pillars of rural libraries – innovation, entrepreneurial spirit, and caring – as essential, though hard to sustain, in the face of poor connectivity and infrastructure, small and declining tax bases, higher operating costs, lack of resources, lower incomes and literacy rates, and small or declining populations. Rural libraries deliver high-level services to citizens and ensure the greatest equity consistent with their resources and those of their partners. In fact, it is frequently observed that such communities are in greater and not less need of robust connectivity.

Valhalla Center [hamlet] (AB)

“The services that our library offers are essential to our people as we have no other services offered here.”

Athabasca (AB) Public Library

“We work closely with Words Work, our local literacy program. We provide a venue for Books for Babies and Family Literacy promotion. We also have staff members who act as volunteer tutors for the adult literacy component of Words Work.”

“Inner bigness”. The success of both the Community Access Program (Industry Canada) and the Gates Foundation program up to Spring 2004 attests to the capacity of even small libraries to do a lot with a little. In Nunavut, the application of similar spirit and inter-agency cooperation helps to mitigate the impact of geography and distance in a territory with only 26,000 people, three time zones, four official languages, a lack of roads, and a largely oral traditional culture.

However, the Spring 2004 announcement by Industry Canada that it was terminating the LibraryNet program and reducing the CAP program by 44% leaves Canada's connectivity partnerships, which have created a unique Canadian breakthrough in access and collaboration on the federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal/community levels, in jeopardy, with only minimal federal government involvement.

Urban challenges. Urban libraries are positioned to respond to their own service challenges, developing innovative programs to reflect and integrate the changing multicultural population that so strikingly characterizes our largest cities. Examples include Web interfaces, tours, ESL classes and seminars in minority languages, computer-based language learning labs, and local or regionally shared collections of books and other materials in multiple languages. Research done at the University of British Columbia¹⁵ showed that Internet access computers in the Burnaby (BC) Public Library are heavily used to access foreign newspapers in the languages of the searchers. Their role in immigrant integration and intercultural exchange is certain to grow.

Hamilton (ON) Public Library

The Library's Family Language Kits provide dual language materials (English and the home language) to help families with young children to learn English. Partners include the Community Action Program for Children, the Parents Helping Parents program, and the municipal government. The kits, containing books, videos, cassettes, and puppets, are available in Serbian, Croatian, Arabic, Urdu, Chinese, Vietnamese, Spanish, Punjabi, French, Portuguese, Somali, Hungarian, Albanian, and Khmer.

Calgary (AB) Public Library

Public use computers present an interesting challenge in language use. They need to have the capacity to display the fonts from many languages while changing the way a conventional roman alphabet keyboard behaves so that non-English characters can be entered. By exploiting the little-known features of Microsoft software, the Calgary Public Library has enabled its users to view Web sites in over 50 languages, send and receive email in over 50 languages, and compose documents in Microsoft Word.

Disability. Reflecting the 12.4% of Canadians who, according to Statistics Canada, have a disability, the reality of higher rates of disability among seniors and Aboriginals, and the distinct approach of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms among industrialized countries, Canada's public libraries have established computer workstations for the disabled, built or renovated to accommodate physical differences, and collaborated with the CNIB in extending specialized services to people who are blind or print-disabled. They are active in advocacy to improve the current dismal situation in which only about 3% of the published content is available in alternative format. They have also collaborated with the National Library of Canada (now Library and Archives Canada) on the Canadian Union Catalogue of Alternate Format Materials (CANUC:H). They also provide an inclusive, welcoming place and service to many who are marginalized by psychological or medical problems.

Lincoln (ON) Public Library

“Through CAP sustainability funding, we have recently added two adaptive technology computers with integrated magnification and screen reading for public Internet access by people with print disabilities. . . Organizations in the immediate area like the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAO), Literacy Council of Niagara West are now aware of the inclusive nature of Lincoln’s CAP sites and can encourage their clients who need adaptive technologies to take advantage of the expanded access.”

Saskatoon (SK) Public Library

“Like most public libraries in Canada, we see ample evidence of the social problems facing our communities. Many of our patrons have personal hygiene problems because they are unable to bathe or wash their clothes. We frequently deal with patrons who have mental health or behavioural problems. One of my earliest experiences working the reference desk . . . involved assisting an unkempt man who said, ‘Can you get me a book on this? My doctor says I have it.’ He then gave me a piece of paper with ‘leukemia’ written on it. . . It is heartening that so many of Saskatoon’s marginalized citizens use the public library.” (Sue Emson, Literacy Librarian).

Aboriginals. Urban libraries have also strengthened services, in consultation with their communities, for Aboriginals, of whom 70% now live off-reserve. As Aboriginals are the fastest-growing ethnic group in Canada, these services will become more essential. In addition, the public libraries in small Aboriginal communities are in urgent need of strengthening. This has become a priority of Canada’s library associations, along with the recruitment of Aboriginals into librarianship.

Regina (SK) Public Library

The Albert Branch of the Regina Public Library, which serves a largely Aboriginal community, has a formal agreement with the Community Association that engages the advice of the Association on programs and services to meet the needs of the Aboriginal users. Special programs include the Community Stories Program, bringing local fire fighters to classrooms to read to students, and a Come Read With Me program that includes crafts and library visit. Programming at this branch has also included Cree classes, pow wow dancing, beadwork, storytelling, and other programs directed toward cultural awareness.

Whitefish River (ON) First Nation Public Library.

“The Whitefish River First Nation Public Library is a major access point of our community for computer and Internet services, as we are the only site in the community that provides these services for free. The stats have continued to rise in the time that the computers have been here. Computer/Internet usage is up by more than 100%. By being able to fully network the computers and install the satellite modem, the clients are provided with high speed internet access. . . Patrons greatly appreciate the free training and technical assistance. The librarian provides help to all patrons in using the computers and navigating the Internet. It is very important that this type of technology is available to everyone, regardless of race, gender, income, or age.”

Youth at risk. In all sizes of communities, the importance of the public library to youth at risk (particularly in terms of literacy and justice issues) as a welcoming and inclusive place, an independent learning centre, and a refuge, is significant. It is particularly valuable to children with difficult or crowded home environments, youth who do not thrive in regular school environments, and “latchkey” children. Newer public library services such as homework clubs and peer tutoring groups offer a range of co-curricular support and a place where it is acceptable to be “different”.

Moncton (NB) Public Library

A parent of teenagers describes the Moncton Public Library as “a wonderful, legitimate hangout” for teens . . . “I couldn’t imagine living in a place without a library. Indeed, I would have to start one.”

Iqaluit (NU) Public Library

Young Offenders and others associated with the Baffin Correctional Centre are welcomed in the public library on weekly supervised visits. Many of them come from other Nunavut communities where there is no public library. Special circulation arrangements enable them to borrow materials without difficulty and they look forward to the weekly visits.

Toronto Public Library

At the Albion Library, located in a high need, low income multicultural neighbourhood, teen programs are breaking down the cultural barriers as youth from every walk of life enjoy programs together. In the Animeshon Club, 74 teens screen anime (a form of Japanese animation of great appeal to teens) films, read subtitles in English and discuss the films and related literature. This is particularly valuable in a community where literacy is an issue. The Club members have just developed their own Web site. Recently the father of a 16 year old member called to express his appreciation, noting that his son was in the “high risk” category and had previously had no creative outlet for his energy.

Aging population. Public libraries enable the elderly to continue learning, access free leisure resources, communicate with families through email, and receive reading materials by delivery if they are homebound. This helps to maintain the independence of the elderly and strengthens social cohesion in Canada.

Nelson (BC) Public Library

“Mr. ___ is 97 years old and an inveterate reader. He read everything in regular print that interested him and then read out our large-print collection. So we moved on to borrowing books for him from other libraries. He is on a fixed income and lives on his own. Books are, he says, his ‘friends’, so our library and the interlibrary loan system are essential to his well-being and continued good health.”

A public library in Saskatchewan

“Mabel, a retired teacher, has re-vitalized her skills by receiving training from the University of Regina’s Learning Technologies for Older Adults Program. She has trained four other seniors to be tutors. Now up to 35 seniors meet at the Library Mondays to learn how to use the Internet and email to family and friends.”

Digitizing and sharing Canada’s stories. The public library has taken a leadership role in the recording, preserving, and now digitizing of the stories of Canada’s communities. It has also enabled people to develop the skill to find or create their family stories. Knowing and telling our story contributes to social cohesion and intercultural communication, demonstrates Canada’s cultural diversity, and helps people understand similarities and differences in cultures and regions. It is one significant way of ensuring that communities see themselves in the nation’s story. Our unique identity and culture are built on the foundation of these community stories and experiences.

Pictou-Antigonish (NS) Public Library

The Library created the Pictou and Antigonish War Cenotaphs Web page, a collection of photos and transcriptions from local memorials of First and Second World Wars and the Korean War. Each soldier’s name is linked to biographical information from Veterans’ Affairs.

North Bay (ON) Public Library

Through a partnership involving the City of North Bay, the local Chamber of Commerce, the North Himsworth Public Library, and the Himsworth Museum, and with funds from the Cultural Partnerships Branch of the Ontario Government and Industry Canada, the North Bay Public Library digitized over 3000 images related to the Dionne Quintuplets. Included in its archival Web site are digital copies of artefacts, magazine articles, photographs, newspaper clippings, in browsable format, with English and French access.

OBJECTIVE: STRENGTHENING THE KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY

Local economic development. On the local economic development front, most current and expected job growth is in small business. Canada's public libraries support job creation and enhancement. They are among the most accessible and successful of business incubators. The integrated resources of public libraries are ideal for the small business, home-based business, and business start-up niche. For example, a small business in landscaping requires not only business finance and administration resources, but also specialized information about plants, soils, safety, equipment, and insects. Public libraries work effectively with advisory (e.g., business planning) services to deliver the combination of information, training, and advice that is key to successful business start-up. They are also popular destinations for tourists, now that all provide Internet access, assisting visitors with travel plans and email updates.

Manitoba's CIMNet

Public libraries were among the leaders in the creation of CIMNet, which in turn created a set of tools for developing community Web sites. CIMNet also created community development software enabling communities to work in collaboration with private firms, branches of government, and non-governmental organizations to solve community problems and strengthen local economies.

From a public library in Saskatchewan

"Jerry, a local entrepreneur, learned how to market his manufactured goods on the Internet by attending e-commerce classes at the Library."

Newfoundland , September 11, 2001

Gander, Stephenville, St. John's, and the surrounding communities hosted thousands of stranded airline passengers for several days following the shutdown of American airports in the wake of the terrorist attacks. Extending their hours, public libraries provided Internet service and crucial email access to the passengers and laptops from the Gates program were set up at each of the sites. In the words of Gander library staff, "We welcomed a steady stream of people wanting to use the Internet to email family and friends . . . approximately 1100 people used our system – people from Kenya, Uganda, Ireland, Belgium, France, and the U.S. In a time of such turmoil, we found it gratifying to provide a safe haven."

The volatile information marketplace. In the face of a high rate of change in their environment, public libraries help the individual to function, and even thrive, in a volatile information marketplace. They develop creative responses to changes in the way in which formal education is carried out (e.g., curriculum, home schooling, online delivery of programs); changes in the publishing industry (e.g., new formats, consortium-based purchasing of online

data bases); changes in information technology (e.g., bandwidth, architecture, software) and user behaviour in accessing technology (e.g., mainstream Internet use, personalization, nature and persistence of the Digital Divide); and changes posed by the new economy (e.g., globalization, home-based business start-up, self-employment, training and re-training).

Pictou-Antigonish (NS) Public Library

The Library developed the Business Room in partnership with the Nova Scotia Provincial Library, LibraryNet, Service Nova Scotia, Office of Economic Development, Industry Canada-Business Gateway.ca, HRDC, and NorthCap. This initiative has created a government service delivery model in a public library and produced a replicable model.

Toronto Public Library

In cooperation with Ontario Works, Toronto Public Library offers Study Halls and Homework Help in high needs areas. At the Maria Shchuka Branch, trained volunteers will be helping teens in Grades 9 to 12 with their homework in Fall 2004.

Fostering a culture of lifelong learning. Public libraries foster and support a learning culture in a knowledge-based economy. They are vital to any major strategy that involves lifelong learning, e-learning, or self-directed learning. Lifelong learning has been identified in every major report and study as key to preparing Canadians for the jobs of the future, while ensuring their competency for the current job market. As governments increasingly encourage policies that build the knowledge economy, the necessary competencies must draw upon accessible information resources. Public libraries are essential for this transition.

Oxford County (ON) Public Library

“We have had a woman approximately 30 years old coming to the library for about the past 3 years. Due to her religion she has only completed grade eight. She lives on a farm with no electricity, or modern conveniences. She presently is working as a housekeeper for some local families. . . The CAP student here at the library offered to help her learn about computers. . . She went through basic and intermediate and started advanced work books with him. He set her up with an email account and showed her the basics of the Internet. . . She learned more about the Internet, and how to create a resume. She has since created a resume in Microsoft Word, and taken it to future employers.”

From a public library in Saskatchewan

“Our local Assisted Living Program (funded by the Regina Health District, and designed to provide various programs and assistance to seniors and handicapped people so they are able to live in their homes) has made extensive use of the Internet here for all kinds of information on health, aging, etc. This most certainly has been a direct benefit to our community.”

Creating intellectual capital. Libraries create intellectual capital in the form of digital collections, both as local institutions and in consortia. These collections not only help Canadians to understand their own roots and contemporary society, but also build digitization capacity and skill and establish appropriate standards. Libraries are experts in the research, preparation of text, metadata, copyright clearance, and Web site development required. Through such initiatives as Our Roots/Nos Racines and the Canadian Initiative on Digital Libraries with Library and Archives Canada, public libraries help to create free materials for a robust public domain, supporting formal education, scholarly research, and lifelong learning in an increasingly proprietary digital world.

Bibliothèque nationale du Québec

The online exhibit “L’héritage sépharade d’Afrique du Nord” gathers images of over one hundred illuminated manuscripts, books, and ketubah (Jewish marriage contracts) lent by Montreal Sephardic families for the original exhibit at the Library.

Western Counties (NS) Regional Library

In partnership with the municipal government, the Library created a Web site on significant 18th and 19th century heritage properties in Digby, N.S., chosen by age, architectural merit, and history. The site is searchable by name, date, architectural style, and community name, and includes both full text and images. It contributes to local and visitor awareness of these historic Atlantic Canada assets .

Library purchasing power. As 60 to 65% of public library spending of over \$880 million¹⁶ is estimated to be local, public libraries are part of the local economy. Their purchasing power also helps to create a market for Canadian information products, helping to sustain the publishing industry.

How do libraries compare to Indigo?

“The inventory of books, videos and CDs in Canadian public libraries is estimated at almost five times that of all the Indigo stores, Canada’s largest book retailer. (Public libraries: 90,300,000. Indigo: 18,800,000)”¹⁷

Career choice and employment seeking. Libraries also make available to students and parents the latest information on career choice, availability of education and training programs, and information on job availability (frequently in partnerships with government). They also provide a venue for job seekers to communicate with potential employers through email. This is one of the most popular services of the public library for people seeking employment.

Oxford County (ON) Library

“This patron moved to town approximately one year ago. She was married and had a fulltime job. She first came to the library to browse, check out books, and search the Internet. Approximately six months after she moved here, she lost her job to downsizing, and split up with her husband. She came into the library to upgrade her resume. Using the new Service Canada equipment, she would fax her resume out to the jobs that interested her from the job banks. Within a month she had a part time waitress position, and a part time factory position. A week after getting hired for those jobs she had an interview and was given a full time secretarial position. She is also very thankful for the help the library offered her in a difficult time.”

A public library in Saskatchewan

“One of my patrons was a waitress (minimum wage), her husband was a labourer (again minimum wage). They have two children. She wanted to take a computer course to get a better job and approached social services and unemployment insurance and was told she didn’t qualify for funding and to take out a loan if she wanted to take the course. Of course, being so low income, they didn’t qualify for a loan, either. . . She [used the government sites on the Internet and found] info on funding for low-income families to upgrade themselves. She is now taking her computer course, has passed each section so far with honours and after speaking to someone about doing her 2 weeks practice in an office, was told if she was any good she could have a permanent job. Her husband is now studying to get his GED (studying a book he got through the library) so the whole family has benefited from ‘Every Library Connected’.”

London (ON) Public Library

In partnership with Human Resources Development Canada, the Library offers Employment Resource Centres in several branches. Users can search for job postings, labour market information, and training opportunities, create professional resumes, use computerized tools to investigate their aptitudes and interests, fax or email job applications, or submit Employment Insurance claims.

Literacy and skill development. Across Canada, public libraries enable adult literacy improvement, frequently in partnership with local volunteer-based literacy groups. They enable improved skill and information levels among employed workers and those seeking to create their own jobs by creating a small business. There is much greater potential for community-based collaboration in turning around Canada's serious literacy problems and public library participation in them. In a dramatic and measurably effective "all-city" focus on adult literacy improvement in Birmingham, U.K., for example, the public library system played a key role. Public libraries enable workers to strengthen their employability and learn at their own pace.

Vancouver (BC) Public Library

The VPL's free drop-in Adult Learning Centre provides help with reading, writing and mathematics. Learners are assisted by Vancouver Community College instructors.

A public library in Saskatchewan

"Mike, a summer student, used a new computer contributed by the 'Every Library Connected' program to create community heritage Web content, and, at the same time, develop his virtual portfolio for future employers and post-secondary institutions to which he has now successfully applied."

Regina (SK) Public Library

"Sally came to our computer lab class which was an hour of literacy on the computer and an hour of instruction. It was a class of eight. Sally improved her literacy skills and passed the GED. She came back and said 'I have a job. I'm finally somebody!' I told her that she was always somebody, but she had never felt that way as an unemployed person."

Sustainability and skills shortages. Although high levels of public satisfaction are evident, there are clear danger signs about public library sustainability. The challenge of public Internet access is noted above. Another deep concern is staff skill shortages. Notwithstanding the strong philosophical commitment of Canada's public libraries to respond to the accelerating cultural diversity, skill levels must be upgraded to respond to changing demographics in Canada. The impact of these skill shortages is compounded by the general demographics of librarianship. The library profession anticipates a major loss of mature professionals (similar to that experienced in nursing, teaching, and engineering) in the next five to ten years. There is an urgent and growing need for specially-trained library staff to strengthen service to Aboriginals, youth at risk, and multicultural groups, and to extend community-based librarianship and through partnerships. There is a need for marketing, communication, and advocacy skills to advance the remarkable story of Canada's libraries to decision-makers at all levels.

Hanna (AB) Public Library

“I have had the privilege of being the librarian at this mid-size town library for 20 years and have seen so many changes – most of them very positive. The single largest change I have seen is the continuously increasing demand from customers requesting highly accurate, often technical and always timely information. This is certainly a challenge in a rural area. We are becoming so much better at delivering this service – but- we need more support. Staffing remains a major issue – and paying the staff at a reasonable level is very difficult for small libraries.”

National Core Library Statistics Program

“The biggest challenge facing the library community is telling its story – going beyond the data in meaningful ways that will resonate with sponsors, policy makers, politicians, and library users alike.”¹⁸

Conclusion

Public libraries have the capacity to lend their considerable strengths to the achievement of policy initiatives across Canada well beyond their “traditional” scope. There is no need to limit or replace their traditional services, which remain extraordinarily successful and respond to continuing high public demand. Public libraries can leverage and build on both their longstanding and newer services. They can do this because their services, values, community uptake, and infrastructure lend themselves well to the major policy thrusts of our time.

There are excellent opportunities for positioning public libraries as the partners of choice to maximize the practical results desired by governments at all levels, qualitatively and quantitatively. Indeed, as government tighten their belts, there may be even greater motivation to see these opportunities through new eyes. Certainly the record shows that when investments are made in solutions involving public libraries, libraries deliver. In the service of the social and economic objectives that Canadians have said - and governments have agreed - are the most critical ones, in the service of Canadians’ deeply held values, and in a context of ongoing fiscal restraint, it is time to put strengths together across departments and jurisdictions. It is time to lay the ground work for the full utilization of this venerable and creative institution - the Canadian public library – in the twenty-first century.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 A composite figure of “over 97%” was compiled from provincial and territorial public library statistics by the Canadian Library Association in the late 1990s (personal communication). See also data and inferences in Schrader, A.M. and Brundin, M.R. *National Core Library Statistics Program: statistical report, 1999: cultural and economic impact of libraries in Canada*. Ottawa, 2002. (p. 15: “in all likelihood the entire population of Canada was covered, or close to it”; and p. 46: “almost all Canadians”)
- 2 Library and Archives Canada. *Directions for Library and Archives Canada: creating a new kind of knowledge institution*. Ottawa, 2004. p. 5
- 3 Ekos Research Associates. *Canadians, public libraries and the Internet*. Final report. Ottawa, 1998. (unpaged)
- 4 Schrader, A.M. and Brundin, M.R. *Op. cit.*, p. 120
- 5 OCLC Canada. *Libraries: how they stack up. Canadian edition*. Chambly, Quebec : Dublin, Ohio, 2004. p.3
- 6 *Citizens first 2000*. Erin Research Inc for the Public Sector Service Delivery Council and the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 2001. *Citizens first 3*. Erin Research for the Institute for Citizen Centred Service and the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 2003.
- 7 dma Planning and Management Services. *The library’s contribution to your community: a resource manual for libraries to document their social and economic contribution to the local community*. Toronto: Southern Ontario Library Service, 1998. Social/personal impacts include: personal growth/development (information services for personal decisions, lifelong learning, search for employment, use of leisure time, reading readiness for pre-school children, multicultural services), community development (social interaction/sense of community, satisfaction with the community as a place to live, community awareness), and support to community groups/agencies (information services, other services, support for individuals in the education system). Economic impacts include direct economic impact (employment, purchase of goods and services), support to local business/investors (information services to local business, information service to personal investors, new business development), and indirect economic impact (industrial/commercial attraction, support for the retail sector, enhanced property value, marketing and promotional information in support of local business).
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- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 120
- 12 American Library Association. *Study: public library training for parents, caregivers dramatically boosts early literacy across income, education levels.* (News Release, 24 February, 2004)
- 13 *Ibid.*
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- 15 Curry, Ann. *What are public library users viewing on the Internet? An analysis of the transaction logs of Burnaby, Brantford, Calgary, Winnipeg, and Halifax Public Libraries.* Submitted to Industry Canada 2002. p. 21
- 16 Schrader, A.M. and Brundin, M.R. *Op. cit.*, p.119
- 17 OCLC Canada. *Op. cit.*, p.2
- 18 Schrader, A.M. and Brundin, M.R. *Op. cit.*, p.56

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